

EARLY ENGLISH CHRISTIAN POETRY, translated into alliterative verse by Charles W. Kennedy; O.U.P.; 10s. 6d.

This is a worthy and handsome presentation of a superb literature. The Christian faith had taken fast hold upon the Anglo-Saxons when these poems were written in the seventh and eighth centuries and they reflect its teaching and liturgy in the distinctive glass of their own codes and conventions. Here is Christ the 'Ring-giver', 'Helm of princes', 'Warden of the wave', and men who persevere in faithful loyalty fearing to wander 'lordless and lonely, lacking all good' in a world where most respect fell to him 'Who best has bolstered his lord in battle'. The heroic epic and lyric find in Christ and 'His thanes' their central figure and theme.

Professor Kennedy's alliterative verse translation imitates the original structure with considerable success, preserving the combination of brutally factual statement rich in direct description with expansion into flowing and delicate periphrasis. This vigour and accuracy make the verse translation vastly superior to a prose rendering.

The book is well-arranged in sections covering the various types of subject matter upon which the poems are based. The story of Genesis is re-created in poetic narrative, the tale of St Helena and the True Cross springs from an unknown Vita among the Latin traditions of the Cross, while the Advent Lyrics are developments of the antiphons used in the Liturgy during that season. Similarly a homily of Gregory the Great is shaped into the 'Ascension' and the allegories of the Whale, the Phoenix and the Panther originate in Greek and Latin bestiary traditions.

The poems are accompanied by a lucid critical commentary discussing each one and placing it according to its sources. One might recommend that the poetry itself should be given a first reading before the introductions which are sometimes almost overwhelmingly explanatory, but the information is certainly useful for further study.

The book, originally published in stiff-covers in 1952, is now issued in semi-stiff covers attractively designed by Lorraine Blake. The format is clear and helpful. It is a volume which might equally well be bought for its record of the freshness and endurance of faith of the early Church with a devotional or meditative purpose, as for the tough yet subtle pleasures of its poetic forms.

CHRISTINE THIRLWAY

BORN UNDER SATURN, by Rudolf and Margot Wittkower; Weidenfeld and Nicholson; 48s.

The image of the artist is subject to dramatic variations. He may be seen to be essentially different to society, the prophet, the seer, the sufferer from divine frenzy: something like those prophesiers in the early church and in all 'enthusiastic' religious movements since, who were thought to give utterance to the